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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 01/21/09

INDEX:

(1) Government to aim at strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance (Yomiuri)

(2) Obama administration: Exploring economic cooperation between
Tokyo and Washington (Nikkei)

(3) U.S. at turning point toward pragmatism (Asahi)

(4) MSDF dispatch off Somalia: Japan's lack of policy conspicuous;
Despite three months of study, no order has been issued for
preparations; New law may delay (Yomiuri)

(5) Uncertainty over U.S. force realignment in Japan; Revising
Futenma relocation plan might be difficult (Okinawa Times)

ARTICLES:

(1) Government to aim at strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance

YOMIURI ONLINE (Full)
2:22 p.m., January 21, 2009

In the wake of the launch of the U.S. Obama administration, the
government intends to aim at further strengthening Japan-U.S.
alliance.

Prime Minister Taro Aso plans to visit the United States to conduct
a Japan-U.S. summit ahead of the financial summit to be held on
April 2 in London in an effort to build cooperative bilateral
relations with the United States to bring stability to the global

economy.

Following President Obama's inaugural address, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura said in a press briefing this morning: "I felt (President Obama's) enthusiasm to change unilateralism to a cooperative policy course. Japan, too, must join hands with the Obama administration for the peace and stability of the world." Kawamura also indicated that the government is making coordination with the United States for the prime minister's visit to the United States before the financial summit.

The year 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Some have mentioned the need to reconfirm on this occasion the significance of the Japan-U.S. alliance. But under the divided Diet, Japan may find it difficult to extend cooperation on the security front. There is no knowing whether the two countries can build a closer relationship.

Additional contribution to the war on terror in Afghanistan is likely to be Japan's first challenge.

The United States is expected to ask Japan for greater human contributions, including the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces. But Japan plans to continue extending cooperation centering on funds based on domestic political conditions and the security situation in Afghanistan. The government is scheduled to come up with additional concrete contribution measures to present them to the new U.S. administration. Coordination with the United States does not seem easy.

TOKYO 00000122 002 OF 007

The realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station (Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture), is another major challenge.

Okinawa is calling for moving the envisaged Camp Schwab replacement facility offshore. With Washington remaining dismissive of Okinawa's call, Tokyo finds itself under tense pressure. Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima expressed his hope toward the new U.S. administration by releasing a statement earlier today reading: "I expect (the new administration) will make greater efforts regarding the U.S. base issue and a steadily settlement will be achieved."

Additionally, the Obama administration has demonstrated a stance to proactively address global challenges, such as climate change. Tokyo wants to realize foreign ministerial talks at an early date to forge relations of trust by closely monitoring the new U.S. administration's steps.

Prime Minister Aso to aim at overcoming the financial crisis in cooperation (with Obama)

In the wake of the inauguration of President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Taro Aso, before the press corps at his official residence at noon today, expressed Japan's intention to aim at overcoming the global financial crisis in cooperation with the United States.

The prime minister said: "(Listening to the inaugural address), I felt that (President Obama's) view on the economic crisis coincides with mine. His approach to bring out the people's potential is basically the same, as well. The address made me feel certain once again that the world's largest and the second largest economies can join hands to move forward."

(2) Obama administration: Exploring economic cooperation between Tokyo and Washington

NIKKEI (Page 5) (Almost Full)
January 21, 2009

Following the inauguration of the Obama administration, policy cooperation between Tokyo and Washington over economic challenges will also enter a new phase. Currently, there are no serious disputes, such as economic friction, between the two countries. What will be brought into question is rather the way new cooperation

should be at a time when the structure of the global economy is undergoing a sea change. In view of worsening economies of various countries, the environmental issue and the rise of emerging countries, such as China, it is imperative for Japan to search for the way to cooperate with the U.S. that is different from the current approach.

Close talks on environment and trade

State Minister for Financial Services Sochi Nakagawa on January 20 said, "I would like to see my counterpart as soon as he or she is appointed."

Self-help effort indispensable

Expectations are running high for the Obama administration's economic stimulus measures centered on tax brakes and public spending. President Obama plans to come up with an economic stimulus

TOKYO 00000122 003 OF 007

package totaling 775 billion dollars or approximately 70 trillion yen to overcome the economic crisis. Once the U.S. economy is back on the recovery track, the Japanese economy would reap its benefit. In the meantime, Japan will be pressed to make more self-help efforts, including expanding domestic demand and coming up with a growth strategy.

The Obama administration will have no time to breathe with a meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors from the Group of Seven nations (G-7) slated for mid-February in Rome, followed by an emergency financial summit joined by 20 nations to be held in April in London. Prime Minister Taro Aso, who puts up economic stimulus packages totaling 75 trillion yen, is geared up to make an appeal of his stance of taking a joint step with Obama with an additional economic stimulus package featuring employment measures.

One of the challenges facing President Obama is the worsened state finances. Massive tax cuts during the Reagan administration in the middle of the 1980s have brought about the so-called twin deficits in trade and budget. Japan, which was hit by strong-yen syndrome due to a sudden rise in the value of the yen, had to adopt a money-easing and fiscal expansion policy over a long period of time, ushering in the bubble economy in the second half of the 1980s.

Taking a joint step over the global warming issue will also become a focus of attention. The deadline for talks on a new framework for measures to curb global warming is 2009. President Obama is reportedly positive about taking such measures. Japan intends to confer on mid-term goals for cutting global warming greenhouse gas emissions at an early date. It wants to lead talks, involving the U.S.

Amid global trade losing steam, a senior Foreign Ministry official revealed a plan to hold working-level talks with the United States Trade Representative (USTR) possibly in mid-February. Multilateral trade talks sponsored by the World Trade Organization (WTO) remains suspended. The government will explore ways to stem protectionist moves, including raising trade tariffs, a practice spreading all over the world, along with cooperation for reaching an agreement at the WTO talks.

Change in relations with China

Import conditions for U.S. beef have been strengthened due to the discovery of a BSE case in the U.S. The government plans to launch talks with the U.S. promptly so as to ease the issue, which is said to be the only thorny issue between the two countries, as one senior Foreign Ministry official put it. It also wants to hold talks on a free trade agreement involving the Asia-Pacific region. The Obama administration has yet to clarify its stance regarding those issues. The Japanese government has a scenario of reshaping a framework for bilateral talks on broad-based agenda items and making such lead to strengthened relations.

One element that will change historic Japan-U.S. relations is the rise of China. China is now the largest U.S. national bond holder in

the world, overtaking Japan. There is a possibility of Japan's presence diminishing. There might appear cases in which Japan may search for nontraditional economic ties with the U.S.

It is hardly possible to discuss international cooperation without taking emerging countries, such as China, which is closing up on the

TOKYO 00000122 004 OF 007

U.S. in terms of GDP, into account. The presence of China as Asia's new face will affect the future of Japan-U.S. cooperation on such international scenes like the G-8 Summit.

(3) U.S. at turning point toward pragmatism

ASAHI (Page 1) (Slightly abridged)
January 21, 2009

By Yoichi Kato, American General Bureau chief of the Asahi Shimbun

The inauguration of President Obama has raised the hopes of Americans. Seeing Obama sworn in as America's first black leader, many American people feel that the U.S. is coming closer to the ideal of being a "more perfect federation" as stipulated in the preamble of the Constitution of the United States.

Perplexed at repeated statements hostile to white people made by a pastor who is his close friend, Obama delivered a speech in the spring of last year stressing the need for Americans to squarely face the race problem. In the speech, titled, "A more perfect federation," Obama said that the ideal of securing equal citizenship under law is included in the constitution as a key point. He explained that he had decided to stand as a candidate for the presidency with the aim of bridging the gap between the ideal and reality. With the success in "this experiment of democracy that seems unfeasible," a sense of achievement has been spreading across the nation. Even so, Obama is not just an idealist.

The Obama administration will change the age of ideology under the previous Bush administration into an age of pragmatism. Different from George W. Bush, who accepted assertions by neoconservatives, who say they do not mind even using weapons to disseminate democracy, Obama is a liberal internationalist. Even so, he is unlikely to opt for the ideologically-motivated management of government because such challenges as economics, terrorism and environmental protection cannot be handled with only support from liberal members.

Obama picked a conservative person who is against same-sex marriages to give a sermon at the inaugural. He has brought Hillary Clinton, with whom he fought in the preliminary election, into his government and has also tried to build a relationship with John McCain, the Republican candidate for the presidential election.

A former senior U.S. government official who knows about Obama commented: "He is a complete pragmatist. He is mulling how to make his administration a success."

American people have put full confidence in and expectations on President Obama, reflecting their strong dissatisfaction at the current situation. About 80 PERCENT of all Americans think that the nation has been on the wrong track. Obama will be burdened with their discontent from the moment he came into office. In a speech, Obama expressed his determination to put the government on the right track. He also talked about "responsibility" and "obligation" to the people. The Obama administration is expected to also ask Japan and its other allies to take "responsibility."

Obama's assumption of presidency itself is a monumental achievement that will go down in U.S. history. But the question is whether he would be able to bring about a major change in U.S. politics. That

TOKYO 00000122 005 OF 007

depends on the outcome of his efforts to pursue ideals and to manage his government in a practical way.

(4) MSDF dispatch off Somalia: Japan's lack of policy conspicuous; Despite three months of study, no order has been issued for preparations; New law may delay

YOMIURI (Page 13) (Abridged slightly)
January 21, 2009

Hidemichi Katsumata, senior writer

It has been three months since the government announced that it would consider dispatching the Maritime Self-Defense Force on an anti-piracy mission in waters off Somalia. At long last, the government is likely to come up with specifics for the dispatch.

Main points

The government should order relevant agencies for advance preparations in parallel with the study for the dispatch.

There was enough time to establish anti-piracy legislation in place of heavily restricted maritime policing activities.

Eighteen years ago, then Defense Agency Director General Yukihiro Ikeda, in order to secure the safe navigation of Japanese vessels, ordered the MSDF to dispatch (minesweepers) to the Persian Gulf to remove mines that had been planted by Iraq. His order read: "I hereby order you to eliminate danger in the Persian Gulf in order to secure safety for the navigation of Japanese vessels." This order can be used as is by just replacing the "Persian Gulf" with "waters off Somalia."

What is different though is that defense chief Ikeda informally instructed the MSDF to make preparations well over a month before his official order. Surveying available harbor facilities in the Persian Gulf, the MSDF hurried to select its personnel and procure food.

On April 16, 1991, Ikeda issued a formal order to make preparations with the aim of eliminating the international stigma that Japan had contributed money but did not expend any "sweat." The advance preparations allowed the MSDF to dispatch six minesweepers just 10 days after Ikeda's formal order.

This time around, Prime Minister Taro Aso announced last October that the government would positively look into dispatching the MSDF. That was followed only by his instruction in late December to Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada to expedite the study.

Securing the safety of sea lanes is especially vital for Japan. As such, the government should have had Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry departments in charge conduct diplomatic procedures that are required when dispatching destroyers and P-3C patrol planes and carry out a survey of airports and seaports in the region, in tandem with considering the dispatch.

According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), seven vessels have been attacked and two vessels have been robbed this year in pirate-infested waters near Somalia. Navies of 21 countries and organizations, including the European Union (EU) have been engaged in warning and surveillance activities. Japan's lack of policy

TOKYO 00000122 006 OF 007

stands out. The government and ruling parties will reportedly come up with a policy course before the end of the week to dispatch the MSDF under SDF Law Article 82 on maritime policing activities and to establish an anti-piracy law shortly thereafter.

Nevertheless, the article, the basis for the dispatch, envisages activities in waters near Japan. The MSDF is allowed to protect Japan-related vessels only, and the use of weapons is also heavily restricted. For this reason, the need to establish anti-piracy legislation has been mentioned from early on. The government has been considering the dispatch for three months now, which was enough to establish a new law.

A senior Defense Ministry official explained why it had taken so

long to reach a conclusion: "It was clear from past overseas dispatches that the government discusses matters until troops are sent and takes a hands-off approach after that. It was conceivable that the government would not opt for a new law once the MSDF is dispatched to conduct maritime policing activities." Even if the MSDF begins preparations now, the dispatch would not occur until early March.

Lawmakers' failure to take swift action is likely to take a toll on the ocean-transport industry supporting Japan, a trade-oriented country, and the SDF troops to be dispatched.

(5) Uncertainty over U.S. force realignment in Japan; Revising Futenma relocation plan might be difficult

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Excerpts)
January 21, 2009

Barack Obama assumed office as the 44th U.S. president on Jan. 21. Many people in Okinawa are interested in how the new administration will promote the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, because the U.S. strategy will also affect the U.S. military basis in Okinawa, a key pending issue between Japan and the U.S. The U.S., however, is now facing an unprecedented serious economic crisis and other major issues. In the meantime, Japanese politics has been thrown into chaos. Under such circumstances, uncertainty is looming over the feasibility of the roadmap that was agreed on between Japan and the U.S.

Nago City and Okinawa Prefecture have requested that the agreed Futenma relocation plan be revised. But the U.S. government has not indicated a willingness to respond to the request, so the Japanese government remains unable to set a course.

In hopes of breaking the impasse under the Obama administration, which is calling for "change," Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima visited the U.S. early this month and met with officials concerned in succession. But the members of Congress he met only expressed the government's conventional view that the two countries should move forward on the plan, based on the agreement reached between Japan and the U.S.

It is viewed as likely that the Obama administration will appoint former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye as ambassador to Japan, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell as assistant secretary of state, and former commander of Okinawa's 4th Marine Expeditionary Force Wallace Gregson as assistant secretary of defense.

TOKYO 00000122 007 OF 007

Nakaima said, "I have mixed feelings about this lineup" when he met with Foreign Ministry's North American Affairs Bureau Director General Kazuyoshi Umemoto (TN: sic) on Jan. 16.

These three know the Futenma relocation issue in detail, but a source familiar with Japan-U.S. relations commented: "The U.S.' view is that Okinawa would make another request once the U.S. accepts the request to move the construction site further offshore, so the new administration is unlikely to accept the request."

A senior Foreign Ministry official, keeping in mind that the U.S. is saddled with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, said, "It is inconceivable that Defense Secretary Gates will have time to review the agreement."

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which is aiming to grab political power, has insisted on the need for reviewing the U.S. force realignment plan, with some members calling for relocating the Futenma facility outside the prefecture.

President Obama plans to submit his budget message for fiscal 2010 (from October in 2009 through September 2010) to Congress in February. He reportedly will include in the message the necessary expenditures to transfer U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam.

A senior Defense Ministry official, stressing that the Guam transfer plan and the Futenma relocation plan should be handled as a package, questioned the DPJ's response, saying: "The DPJ call for reviewing the plan will be taken as criticizing President Obama just after he takes office. The party does not understand the significance of an agreement reached between Japan and the U.S."

ZUMWALT